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Upanīya Sutta

The Discourse on Leading On | S 1.3 of the Nala Vagga,¹ The Reed Group
 Ee Upaneyya Sutta The Discourse on That Which Is Lead On
 Theme: Life is short; hit the path now
 Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2018

1 Sutta paraphrase and significance

1.1 SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

1.1.1 Summary. The Upanīya Sutta (S 1.3) records a short exchange on the brevity of life [2.1] between a deity and the Buddha. The deity, representing the worldly bent, basically declares that since *life is brief, we should make merits*. The implication is that we would then *live happily and gain good rebirths*. [1.2.1]

Although the Buddha's replies with a verse, he actually echoes the deity's words, changing only the verse's last line [S 3d*]. This is, in fact, where the Buddha's teaching lies—life is brief; hence, giving up the brief and uncertain, we should seek true and lasting peace [1.2.2].

1.1.2 Background. The deity who approaches the Buddha was reborn into a brahma-world with a long lifespan. When he saw beings passing away and being reborn in the sense-world with short lifespans, he felt pity for them. He urged them to do “acts of merit” (*puññāni*), namely, cultivating form dhyanas and formless dhyanas, so that they will be reborn into the form and formless realms with lifespans lasting for many world-cycles.

The Buddha's reply [S 4*] reminds the deity that he is still bound to samsara, the cycle of rebirths and redeaths, and that dhyana does not lead to liberation. Only the peace (*santi*) that is nirvana truly liberates us. (SA 1:23,6-13)

1.2 THE SUTTA KEY VERBS

1.2.1 Upanīyati and its various forms

1.2.1.1 The passive verb *upanīyati* or *upaniyyati*, translated as “(being) rushed on” [S 3a*=5a*] or “(being) led on” [S 3b*=5b*], comes from *upa-* (a prefix with a sense of “up to or towards”) + passive of *neti*, “to lead (on), draw (out, away)” (from Sanskrit *ṇayati*, from √Nī, to lead). *Upanīyati* is the passive form of *upaneti* (Skt *upanayati*), “lead (one) close up to.”²

1.2.1.2 The agent noun for *neti* is *netti*, “that which leads or conducts, leader,” as in *bhava,netti*, “birth-leader” (literally, “that which leads to existence”). The term *bhava,netti* is explained in **the Bhava,netti Sutta** (S 23.3) as our desire for the 5 aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness (or simply, our body and mind)—and our views regarding them or any of the five.³

¹ *Naḷa*: A 2:73,25; J 1:392,4. Cf (1) *naḷī*, a hollow stalk, tube, pipe; a measure of capacity; (2) *nāḷikā*, a stalk, shaft; a tube, pipe or cylinder for holding anything; a small measure of capacity. On **Naḷa Vagga**, see SD 54.2a (1).

² See DP: *upaneti*, ~*nayati*.

³ S 23.3/3:190 f + SD 53.34 (2). Cf Skt *loka,nāyini*, “that which leads the world,” an epithet for “craving” (*tṛṣṇā*, lit “thirst”). *Nāyini* (f) is an agent n from *nayati* (P *neti*), “to lead.”

This term is ironic in the sense that although it refers to “existence” (*bhava*), it really refers to the *end* of existence, death. Hence, *bhava,netti* has the implicit sense of “leading to death,” and endless rebirths. All this, in fact, perfectly explains the sense of the verb *upanīyati* or its gerund *upanīya* [1.2.1.2].

1.2.1.3 The Sutta title uses the form *upanīya* (also spelled as *upaniyya* or *upaneyya*), “leading on” (with the sense of “rushing us on to the end”), the gerund (verbal or participial noun)⁴ or absolutive form of *upanīyati*.⁵ It has a passive sense of “being led on,” that is, we are being led on to our death. *Upanīya* evokes a sense of an independent action (over which we have no real control) that seems to occur all the time: time flies and drags us along with it.

While **S 3*-4*** (the Upanīya Sutta) and **S 310*-414*** (the (Deva,putta) Uttara Sutta) highlight the imminence of death—death comes at any time soon—**Dhammapada 135** reminds us of its certainty, thus:

<p><i>Yathā daṇḍena go,pālo gāvo pāceti⁶ go,caram evaṃ jarā va maccū ca āyurṃ pācenti pāṇinaṃ</i></p>	<p>(Dh 135)</p>	<p>Just as with a staff a cowherd drives the cows to pasture, even so, decay and death drive out the life of the living.</p>
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This is an allegorical verse where the herdsman and his staff are both the life-force (old karma) and also decay-and-death (karmic fruit). The cattle are the living, driven to the pasture that is present karma (like breathing in). Our life-force (past karma) keeps us going like the herdsman and his staff to pasture (create present karma). The herdsman driving the cows back from the pasture is like momentary death (like breathing out). So we breathe in and out, and life goes on; then, suddenly, it all stops.

The Uposathika Itthīnam Vatthu (the story of the women keeping the precept-day) of the Dhammapada Commentary relates how the women of varying ages in the lady Visākhā’s household are observing the precept-day (*uposatha*). When she asks them the reason for their pious conduct, they each give a different reply, but all relate to the gaining of merits (*puñña*) [2.1.1]. The old women hope for a heavenly rebirth; the middle-aged, for freedom from their husbands; and the young, that they may have a child soon.⁷ Led by Visākhā, they approach the Buddha and reports all this. The Buddha then replies by instructing them on the fleeting nature of life. (DhA 10.5/3:58-60)

1.2.1.4 Again, an irony: “Life is leading us on” to the end, to death. When there’s life, there is also death; life must end in death. Theistic religions, as a rule, externalize our locus of control (they project power and succour to an outside agency: we lack the power for self-awakening in such a system). Hence, they imagine or hope for some kind of antithesis to death, that is, eternal life.

But this is only a great statement in dogmatic words: there is, in reality, no such *state*. Whatever exists must exist in time; whatever exists in time is impermanent. Only an idea or vision may be said to be “eternal,” but not what that idea or vision points to (except perhaps for ideas of space).⁸ For that reason,

⁴ See PED: Upanīya.

⁵ See CPD: ¹upa-nīya; DP: upanīya.

⁶ Comy notes a wordplay on *pāceti* which is a near-synonym of *pājeti*, “to drive” (Dh:Patna 200 (12.6) reads *prājeti*; Uv 1.17 *prāpayati*: see SED: pac3): (1) to drive, urge on (“sends,” *peseta*, DhA 6:60) (2) (caus of pacati, “to cook, boil; to torment”) to cause to torment (D 1:52). For philological nn, see Dh:N 95 n135.

⁷ On the traditional lot of Chinese women, see SD 54.2d (2.2.2.3).

⁸ To say something like “Only impermanence is permanent or eternal” is simply stretching the limits of language. The reality is that “things” keeping changing, becoming other; nothing is “fixed.” Even “things” is just an expression with no fixed sense: it can mean “any thing,” or better, “anything.” Just try reflecting on the difference between these two words.

we can never define or limit nirvana with such attributes as being “eternal” and so on—it is unconditioned, free of attributes: it is neither a statement nor a state.⁹

1.2.1.5 In **S 3b* = 4b***, we have *upanīta* (“led on”), the past participle of *upanīyati* [1.2.1]. It refers to an action done in the past and completed. Thus, *jarūpanīta* [S 3b=4b] means “led on by decay,” that is, “dragged ever closer to old age.” Something that happened to us in the past (we were born) is now taking effect on us, and there is almost nothing we can do about it. The usage of “almost” will be explained more fully below [2.2].

1.2.1.6 Both the verses evoke a powerful sense of **the passive**, what is being done to us, about which we can do almost nothing. Life leads us on to its end; we can do nothing about it—at least this is the tone of **S 3*** (the deity’s reflection).

“**Time is short**” (*appam āyu*) or “our lifespan (*āyu*) is short,” warns the closing phrase of S 3a*. To reflect this urgency, it is helpful to render its opening phrase *upanīyati jīvitam* as “Life is ruled on (to its end).”¹⁰ The phrase “**(being) rushed on**” is stronger than the dictionary meaning of *upanīyati*, “being led on.” The whole line has been translated so as to tease out the spirit of S 3a* and 4a*.

1.2.2 *Pajahe*

1.2.2.1 The verb *pajahe*¹¹ is an optative (expressing a wish) form of *pajahati*, “he abandons” [1.2.2.2]. It seems to be rare, occurring only 7 times,¹² all of them in the Samyutta verses, thus:

		<u>verse</u>	
Upanīya Sutta	S 1.3/1:2,29	S 4d	SD 54.2c
Accenti Sutta	S 1.4/1:3,11	S 6d = S 4d	SD 54.2d
Uttara Sutta	S 2.19/1:55,8	S 311d = S 4d	SD 54.2c(3)
(Deva,putta) Nanda Sutta	S 2.27/1:63	S 360d = S 4d	SD 54.2d(3)

This rare verb also occurs in **the Eka,rāja Jātaka** (J 303)¹³ and in the paracanonical work **Netti-p,paka-raṇa**.¹⁴ Apparently, it does not occur anywhere else.

1.2.2.2 The common verb *pajahati*, “he abandons, let go (of), renounces,” is derived from *pa-* (a directional prefix here meaning “forth or out”) + *jahati* (“he lets go of, renounce”) from *vJAH* or *vHĀ*, “to go forth” + *ti* (3rd person singular ending). In fact, *pajahati* and *jahati* are often synonymous.¹⁵ As we shall see, it also has the sense of renouncing all defilements so that we attain the true peace of nirvana [2.2.2].

⁹ Cf “the statement is not the state” or the ineffability of awakening, see SD 26.3 (5.1.2.5); SD 44.1 (5.4).

¹⁰ The (round brackets) refers to an amplified translation, which explains the preceding or the context of the line or verse. If we feel this is intrusive, we need not read the amplification; then, it serves as a mental note that helps us under the lesson of the line or verse better (which is also helpful for the sutta teacher).

¹¹ *Pajahe* occurs in a Jain text, Uttarañjayaṇasutta 456 (Pischel, *A Grammar of the Prākṛit Languages*, 1900: §500) which means that the word was prob known even before the Buddha’s time. This may attest to the earliness of the verse.

¹² A wildcard search using “pajahe” in the CSCD.

¹³ J 303/3:14,6.

¹⁴ Netti 145×2, 146.

¹⁵ For the wide range of its application to “giving up” of unwholesome states, see S 6:57 (index vol).

2 CONTRAST AND SIGNIFICANCE

2.1 PUÑÑA VERSUS KUSALA

2.1.1 Puñña

2.1.1.1 Common amongst the popular religious beliefs of pre-the Buddhist Indians was that our **good fortunes** in this world and in the hereafter (especially a good rebirth in the heavens) is either (1) good luck (*maṅgala*), especially fate, or (2) performing the right ritual actions (*dhamma*), including magic. While the former was mostly popular belief, the latter was practised and promoted by the brahmins in an effort to assert social dominance in a class system they had created.

In **S 3d* = S 310d***, the young deva is presenting a popular worldly belief in luck, fate and ritual as “merits” (*puñña*). Broadly, we may call this **the “popular religious” approach**, prevalent even today in all religions, including much of ethnic and worldly Buddhism steeped in “merit” as belief and ritual; in other words, this is based on wrong views and wrong practices. Often, it is also a superstition: seeking of succour and salvation outside of ourself.

2.1.1.2 Instead of simply rejecting the notion of *puñña* or merit, the Buddha “naturally adapted”¹⁶ it into a Dharma-based teaching and practice. He also accepted the popular notion of *maṅgala* or luck, but redefined it in wholesome ways, as evident from the well-known **Maṅgala Sutta** (Sn 2.4).¹⁷ The supreme blessing (*maṅgalam uttamam*) is not seeking its external signs and succour, but to attend to the following ways of nurturing that supreme blessing:¹⁸

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (1) <u>personal development</u> : | to discipline, educate and refine ourself as a person; |
| (2) <u>social development</u> : | to treat the near and dear well, and help better others and society; |
| (3) <u>individual development</u> : | to discover and cultivate our mental powers to be a true individual; |
| (4) <u>spiritual freedom</u> : | to know and see true reality within ourself so that we are truly blessed. |

2.1.1.3 In terms of **the 3 trainings** (*sikkha-t, taya*) [2.1.1.3], the tradition of *puñña* or “merit” is found in the 1st training, that of moral virtue. Keeping the precepts and living a moral life in itself will bring good rebirth, even this-life happiness. However, by itself, moral virtue still keeps us in samsara, the cyclic life of endless rebirths and redeaths.

The *puñña* ideology includes a worldly idea of the 2nd training—that of mental cultivation, that is, mindfulness and meditation. When this is practised only for our this-life benefit, it is still regarded as merely “making merit”—it keeps us stuck in samsara. We may live happily for a while, even a long while, but karma comprises both “ladders and snakes”—the famous ancient Indian board-game specifically invented to highlight this uroboros¹⁹ effect of karma and samsara. Sooner or later, when bad karma finds its chance to fruit, we go right down the snake’s throat, dragged along by it.

2.1.1.4 The Buddha advises us to practise **the 3 trainings** [2.1.1.3] in full, that is, as a path of self-awakening. This means that our purpose of practising Buddhism must be to waken ourself from our slumber of ignorance and craving. **Ignorance** blinds us into relying of fate, luck and magic; **craving** tricks us

¹⁶ On the Buddha’s practice of “natural adaptation” of popular outside systems, see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).

¹⁷ Khp 4 = Sn 2.4 (SD 101.5).

¹⁸ This “blessing” teaching is a vertical approach to self-development. For a “reciprocal blessing” teaching on a widening horizontal relationships, see **Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31), SD 4.1.

¹⁹ See SD 23.3 (1); SD 49.2 (4.3.2.3).

into believing that when we repeat an action over and over again—such as performing a ritual for wealth, power, love, heavenly rebirth, or whatever worldly wish we may have—we will get our wish.²⁰

The Buddha, however, unequivocally rejects any such notion that is reliant on an external agency, that is, through prayers and priestcraft. The Buddha teaches that such prayers and supplications do not work: When we seek the blessings of long life, beauty, happiness, fame or rebirth in heaven, instead of prayer, we should live our lives with moral virtue and wisdom that conduces to such a path.²¹

In short, this is “the world’s lure” (*lok’āmisā*) that the Buddha warns us about in **S 3d* = S 311d***, and which we should forsake so that we will find “true peace.” Now, we will further examine how this is to be done—that is, the realization of **true peace**.

2.1.1.5 Although the Buddha speaks of **merit** (*puñña*), we must ascertain its context. While he rejects the old “merit-making” based on luck, ritual, prayers and external succour, he advocates a Dharma-based “merit-making,” which is simply another word for **the wholesome** (*kusala*). It is of this second wholesome merit-making that the Buddha declares: “Do not fear merit!” as stated in **the Ma Puñña Bhāyī Sutta** (It 22).²²

The Dve Brāhmaṇa Sutta 1 (A 3.51) relates how two old brahmins visit the Buddha and ask him for a suitable teaching regarding their state. Interestingly, the Buddha actually replies to them with the very same verse as the deity’s [S 3* = S 310*] but qualifies it with another verse, thus:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1 <i>Upanīyati jīvitam appam āyu
jarūpanītassa na santi tāṇā.
Etaṃ bhayaṃ maraṇe pekkhamāno
puññāni kayirātha sukhāvahānīti.</i> [S 3*=310*]</p> | <p>Life is rushed on (to its end); time is short.
For one led on by decay, there’s no shelter.
Seeing this danger in death,
let one make merits that bring happiness.</p> |
| <p>2 <i>Yo’dha kāyena saññāmo
vācāya uda cetasā
taṃ tassa petassa sukhāya hoti
yaṃ jīvamāno pakaroti puññan’ti</i></p> | <p>Who here is restrained in body,
in speech and mind, too,
there’s happiness for him hereafter—
who, while still living, acts in merit.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(A 3.51/1:155), SD 111.2</p> |

We see here the Buddha “naturally adapts” the old “merit” ideology with a new twist, that is, instead of performing rituals and externalizing our locus of control, the Buddha advises to do **wholesome deeds**, that is, being restrained in the 3 doors of karma (the body, speech and the mind) [2.1.2]. Significantly, this “restraint” (*saṃvara*) is a synecdoche or shorthand for the 3 trainings of moral discipline (cultivating our body and speech), mental training (cultivating mental calm and clarity), and based on both, cultivating insight wisdom, to see impermanence and true reality [2.1.1.3].

2.1.2 Kusala

2.1.2.1 If we take moral virtue (*sīla*) as the ethical foundation of our spiritual growth, then it works with concentration or mental focus (*samādhi*) for realizing insight wisdom (*paññā*). When all this is done holistically, this will upgrade us to a **wholesome** (*kusala*) level in our spiritual growth. **Kusala** basically

²⁰ It is important to understand that the Buddha has given us in the Vinaya-based monasticism the ideal *money-free community* so that renunciants can fully dedicate themselves to letting go of all worldliness, especially money, power and pleasure. On the other hand, he enjoins the laity to be diligent and wisely build up their wealth for their own good and happiness and for those of the many: see esp **Dīgha, jānu S** (A 8.54), SD 5.10.

²¹ See esp **Ādiya S** (S 5.41) @ SD 2.1 (3) and **(Pañcaka) Itṭha S** (A 5.43), SD 47.2. On helpful prayer, see SD 2.1 (4).

²² It 22, SD 2.11b (2.2); SD 22.17; SD 22.17(2.1). On *puñña*, further see **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7 (6.3).

means “skillful,” as in one who has mastered a skill or an art or some learning: we are a master or expert in our field.

In relation to our spiritual development, *kusala* refers to our understanding and accepting our potential for rising above our self without measuring against anyone. We are limited by our views—of our self, of others and of things. We “make” merits, but we must “cultivate” the wholesome. We speak of “storing or piling up” *puñña*, but *kusala* is about letting go of ignorance and craving so that we are free of *sam-sara*.

2.1.2.2 To cultivate the wholesome—in the context of **S 4d = 311d**—then, is to practise **the 3 trainings** [2.1.1.3] that is to walk the path of self-awakening. Moral training (*sīla,sikkhā*) disciplines our body and speech, so that we are not troubled by moral guilt and unwholesome communication, and that we are socially wholesome beings. Being bodily cultivated (*bhāvita,kāya*),²³ we are ready to deepen our personal development and cultivation of happiness by way of mindfulness and meditation, that is, mental training (*samādhi,sikkhā*)—so that we are mentally cultivated (*bhāvita,citta*).

2.1.2.3 We need some level of rudimentary wisdom even in the cultivation of moral virtue and mental concentration. Each of these 3 trainings helps one another along the path of practice. As we grow in **wisdom**, our moral virtue becomes stronger and our mental concentration better, so that our wisdom, too, is upgraded and refined. We begin to see deeper and farther through the clouds of unknowing to have a clearer vision of the mountain of true reality.

The first and most important characteristic of true reality we will notice is that everything in this universe is **impermanent**. This fundamental understanding is at the root of liberating wisdom. In other words, it is our lack of understanding of this universal characteristic of life that keeps us chasing after every gleam and glitter of craving in the dark night of ignorance, stumbling over things and running into walls. That is, until we find the switch, turn it on and see our way around and out into the open.

2.2 ACQUISITION AND RENUNCIATION

2.2.1 Acquisition

2.2.1.2 We have, at some length, discussed **S 3* = 310***, where the deity speaks of merit-making, and why the Buddha rejects such a notion, especially coming from a deity, a divine being. The deity’s view of merit-making, then, is a *theistic* one [2.1.1.1]. In Dharma terms, we can explain the Buddha’s rejection of theistic merit-making as seeking succour outside of oneself, seeking salvation in an external agency (such as God) or some posthumous paradise (an imaginative eternal state of bliss).

2.2.1.3 “**Acquisitions**” (*upadhi*) is a helpful concept that helps us understand what the Buddha means in **S 4d* = 311d***. The verb for “acquisition” is **to acquire**, “to gain, obtain, or get as one’s own, to gain the ownership of (by one’s own exertions or qualities)” (OED). *Upadhi*, then, is whatever we acquire, physically and mentally—or wish to acquire (a mental aspect of *upadhi*), which feeds our being and rebirths. In other words, it is craving in action, motivated by ignorance.

Upadhi sounds familiarly like *saṅkhāra*, “karmic constructions and activities” that feed our lives and fuel our rebirths. It is likely that *upadhi* is an ancient concept introduced during the 1st period²⁴ of the

²³ On *bhāvita,kaya* and *bhāvita,citta*, see **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja S** (S 35.127,7) SD 27.6a.

²⁴ The “1st period” is roughly the 1st 20-25 years of the Buddha’s ministry. On the notion of “the 2 periods,” see SD 1.1 (2.2.1); SD 40a.1 (1.3).

Buddha's mission.²⁵ In time, *upadhi* often overlaps with the concept of *upādi*, which simply means “that which clings,” and refers to “substrates of being,” especially the 5 aggregates that fuel life and rebirth.²⁶

There is, however, a subtle difference between *upadhi* and *saṅkhārā*. While *upadhi* highlights the “hunt and keep” (ignoble quest and acquisition) aspects, *saṅkhārā*, as its translation, “formations,” re-iterates, our “karmically creative” or self-projective tendency to build and pile up our karmic potential of bodily, verbal and mental acts. Both terms, however, overlap with the idea of “acquisition.”²⁷

2.2.1.4 *What do we acquire and how do we acquire them?* A simple answer first, which we will then work on [2.2.1.4]. We acquire what we make of the world, and we try to acquire these *made-up* “things.” This is like in the augmented reality (AR) mobile game, Pokemon Go (2016), which uses a mobile device, known as the Global Positioning System (GPS) to locate, capture, battle, and train virtual creatures, called Pokémon (“pocket monsters”), which appear as if they are in the player’s real-world location. A new generation of this addictive game, called Pokemon Quest, appeared in 2018.²⁸

Just as these Pokemon gamers enjoy a virtual world of monster hunting, *upadhi* creates a virtual world of our senses and sense-experiences which we take seriously. We are held captives in *upadhi*’s cave like prisoners in Plato’s cave, taking for real the shadows and sound of passing puppets paraded by unseen puppeteers from behind a parapet behind them.²⁹

2.2.1.5 *In the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta* (M 26), the Buddha recounts how his life is characterized by 2 kinds of quests, that is, the “ignoble quest” (*anariya pariyesanā*) and the “noble quest” (*ariya pariyesanā*). The former generally describes the Bodhisattva’s life *before* his renunciation, while the latter, *after* his renunciation up to his awakening [2.2.2.1]. The Buddha defines **the ignoble quest** as follows:

Here, bhikshus, someone ³⁰		
being himself <u>subject to birth</u> ,	seeks what is also subject to birth;	<i>jāti,dhamma</i>
being himself <u>subject to decay</u> ,	seeks what is also subject to decay;	<i>jarā,dhamma</i>
being himself <u>subject to disease</u> ,	seeks what is also subject to disease;	<i>vyādhi,dhamma</i>
being himself <u>subject to death</u> ,	seeks what is also subject to death;	<i>maraṇa,dhamma</i>
being himself <u>subject to sorrow</u> ,	seeks what is also subject to sorrow;	<i>soka,dhamma</i>
being himself <u>subject to defilement</u> ,	seeks what is also subject to defilement.	<i>saṅkilesa,dhamma</i>
		(M 26,5/1:161 f), SD 1.11

Such an ignoble quest is that of seeking to acquire *what are subject to birth, decay, disease, death, sorrow and defilement, too*. This is the quest to acquire worldly possessions such as “men slaves and women slaves, goats and sheep, fowl and pigs, elephants, cattle, horses and mares, gold and silver.”³¹ Such a quest is “ignoble” (*anariya*), explains the Buddha, because:

²⁵ The term *upadhi*, eg, is common in **Sutta Nipāta**, which preserves many of the earliest Buddhist texts: Sn 33c, 34c, 364a || 33d, 374c, 546a = 572a, 728ce = 1051ac, 789c, 1057b.

²⁶ Hence, *upādi* is a narrower term, clearly a later one. On the difference between *upadhi* and *upādi*, see SD 53.5 (4.2.3.2).

²⁷ On *saṅkhārā*, see **Saṅkhārā**, SD 17.6.

²⁸ It is interesting when we compare Pokemon gamers who seek for virtual monsters. They are like God worshippers who believe in a virtual reality called God, but they generally hate or disapprove all others who do not believe in their version of God. The Pokemon gamers, however, while seeking their virtual monsters made friends with other seekers, unless they need to fight over very rare monsters to catch!

²⁹ On Plato’s cave, see SD 5.16 (19.4.3.2).

³⁰ Four of these conditions—decay, disease, death and defilements (the 4 D’s)—form the topic of (**Catukka**) **Pariyesanā S** (A 4.252), SD 50.9.

³¹ The Sutta gives more details on such an “ignoble” quest: M 26,5-11/1:162 (SD 1.11).

“These **acquisitions** are subject to birth and one is tied to these things, infatuated with them, addicted to them, being himself subject to birth, seeks what is also subject to birth.” (id)³²

2.2.1.6 “Acquisitions,” then, are **upadhi**, literally “that on which something is laid or rests, basis, foundation, substratum.” Here, it means both “worldly possessions or belongings” as well as “attachment to such possessions (forming a basis for rebirth)” (DP). Hence, “acquisitions” (*upadhi*) has pregnant senses: it can be uncountable in the subjective sense of the *desire* for things, or countable in the objective sense, referring to *desirable, desired or grasped objects*, that is what we notice.³³

In simple terms, such acquisitions are “ignoble” because they do not conduce to our approaching, much less, attaining, the noble path of awakening. Such a quest of acquisitions keeps us in the world. [2.2.1.7]

2.2.1.7 The Commentaries give us technical details in terms of related doctrines and list **4 kinds** of **upadhi**: (1) the 5 aggregates (*khandh’upadhi*), (2) the defilements (*kiles’upadhi*), (3) volitional formations (*abhisāṅkhār’upadhi*) and (4) the 5 cords of sense-pleasures (*kāma,guṇ’upadhi*).³⁴ These 4 kinds of *upadhi* are simply a way of speaking of the 1st and the 2nd noble truths—suffering and its arising. They deal with these truths respectively from these aspects: the existential (how we exist), the moral (how defilements work on us), the conative (how intention creates karmic activities), and the psychological (how liking and not-liking work in our experiences).

2.2.1.8 These acquisitions (*upadhi*) are all “empty” passing things. They are **empty** in the sense that none of these acquisitions—these “things”—have any essence or lasting reality. They only make sense in their arising, changing and passing away. When we fail to see this—and think of them as being more than this—then, they become a burden, “acquisitions” to us.

Upadhi as “acquisitions” (plural) are troubling for the simple reason they do not really exist—they are merely virtual realities we create through our 6 senses. They prevent us from growing up, from spiritually maturing: like **Peter Pan** (the boy who wouldn’t grow up) who loses his shadow and has to run after it, catch it and get it stitched back to himself.³⁵

Interestingly, even when the shadow has been stitched back to Peter, it does not return to life—unless there is light. After all, **a shadow** is simply a dark spot created by light. It is that part of us (that looks exactly like us, so to speak) that does not get the light. Hence, it represents the “shadow” of our life: our fears, sadness, ignorance, inability or unwillingness to grow.³⁶

Peter’s shadow casts a dark undertone for the rest of the story. Peter’s shadow and those of his Lost Boys are typically understood to symbolize their inability to physically and mentally mature, to reach adulthood. Although they seem to be caught in some kind of existence in amber, time (in the form of Captain Hook and his crew) is relentlessly seeking to capture and destroy them.

³² These 2 kinds of quests are elaborated into the 4 kinds of right striving (*samma-p, padhāna*), see SD 54.2e (2.3.3).

³³ See SD 53.7 (2.3.1.2).

³⁴ The 4 types of upadhi (MA 3:169; SA 1:31 = SnA 1:44 f): (1) the 5 cords of sense-pleasures (*kāma*) (MA 2:170; ItA 1:64); (2) the 5 aggregates (*pañcak, khandha*) (MA 3:171; ItA 1:89); (3) the defilements (*kilesa*) (MA 3:171; SnA 1:45 f; ItA 1:64; Nm 1:103); (4) volitional activities (*abhisāṅkhāra*) (ItA 1:64; Nm 1:103). Often confounded with the near-synonym *upādi* (trace (of clinging), substrate): see **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,22.1/2:314), SD 13.2.

³⁵ The episode of Peter losing his shadow is in the very 1st act of J M Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1902, 1904). See Elizabeth G, “Shades of a shadow,” 2007, <http://mural.uv.es/marsoga/art7>.

³⁶ In Buddhist mythology, the fact that Peter Pan and the Lost Boys do not grow up make them like the devas, on account of which it is difficult for them to learn the Dharma since they do not experience impermanence. In Buddhism, the shadow is symbolized by Māra, who shadows the Buddha for 7 years but is unable to find anything dark in him: **Satta Vassa S** (S 4.24), SD 36.5.

In the 2008 movie “**The Curious Case of Benjamin Button**” (loosely based on F Scott Fitzgerald’s 1922 short story), Benjamin is a Peter-Pan-figure who ages in reverse: he gets ever younger until he reaches the point of his birth, which becomes his death! In the case of Peter Pan and the Lost Boys, their inability to grow appears as if to be a state frozen in time—it is as if they are already dead. This is a sombre reminder that the natural purpose of life is to grow up, to mature especially in the mind. The body decays, the mind awakens.

2.2.1.9 The Sa,gāthā,vagga has a few other verses that address acquisitions. Here are 2 of the 5 verses of **the (Vaṅgīsa) Arati Sutta** (S 8.2), SD 92.6, quoted here for their direct reference to *acquisitions*:

<p><i>Upadhīsu janā gadhitā diṭṭha,sute paṭighe ca mute ca ettha vinodīya chandam anejo yo tattha na limpati tam munim āhu. (S 714*) Atha saṭṭhi,sitā vitakkā puthu,janatāya adhammā niviṭṭhā na ca vagga,gat’assa kuhiñci no pana duṭṭhulla,bhāni sā bhikkhu. (S 715*)</i></p>	<p>People are bound to acquisitions, to the seen, the heard, the sensed and the known. Dispel the desire for this here: be unshaken. Who clings not therein—he is called a sage. Then, they are stuck to the 60 because of thoughts, devoted to wrong things arising from worldliness. But one not fallen into any faction, nor utter base speech—he is indeed a monk.</p>
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In verse **S 714***, line a says that “People are bound to acquisitions,” where acquisitions clearly refer to worldly or material possessions in terms of the 5 senses and our thoughts [line b]. The true practitioner should be “**unshaken**” (*anejo*) [line c]. When we cling to nothing, we fear losing nothing—such as **the sage**, the one truly renounced [2.2.2].

2.2.1.10 The tone of **S 715*** is psychological. Line a mentions “**the 60**” (*saṭṭhi*), on account of which the foolish is stuck in existence and suffering. It is unlikely that the 60 here refers to the 62 wrong views, which makes it too narrow a technical approach and dismisses the problem as being merely philosophical. The 60 actually refers to “the 60 delightful and pleasurable forms” (*piya,rūpa sata,rūpa*), mentioned in **the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,19.5+20), SD 13.2.

The “60 delightful and pleasurable forms” (*piya,rūpa sata,rūpa*) are, in summary, as follows:

- (1) The 6 internal sense-bases or sense-faculties (***ajjhātik’āyatana***): the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind that are agreeable and pleasurable.
- (2) The 6 external sense-bases or sense-objects (***bāhir’āyatana***): sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts *that are agreeable and pleasurable*.
- (3) The 6 consciousnesses (***viññāṇa***): eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness and mind-consciousness *that are agreeable and pleasurable*.
- (4) The 6 sense-contacts (***samphassa***): eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact and mind-contact *that are agreeable and pleasurable*.
- (5) The 6 sense-based feelings (***vedanā***): feelings born of eye-contact, of ear-contact, of nose-contact, of tongue-contact, of body-contact and of mind-contact *that are agreeable and pleasurable*.
- (6) The 6 perceptions (***saññā***): perceptions of eye-contact, of ear-contact, of nose-contact, of tongue-contact, of body-contact and of mind-contact *that are agreeable and pleasurable*.
- (7) The 6 volitions or intentions (***sañcetanā***): volitions in regard to *sights, to sounds, to smells, to tastes, to touches and to thoughts that are agreeable and pleasurable*.
- (8) The 6 kinds of craving (***taṇhā***): craving for *sights, for sounds, for smells, for tastes, for touches and for thoughts that are agreeable and pleasurable*.

- (9) The 6 kinds of thoughts (**vitakka**): thinking (looking for signs) *of sights, of sounds, of smells, of tastes, of touches and of thoughts that are agreeable and pleasurable.*
- (10) The 6 kinds of ponderings (**vicāra**): pondering [scrutiny of details] *of sights, of sounds, of smells, of tastes, of touches and of thoughts that are agreeable and pleasurable.* (D 22,19.5+20), SD 13.2³⁷

2.2.1.11 This is an Abhidhamma-like comprehensive listing of all **the worldly engagements** that bring about acquisitions of worldly things and states, and the *craving* for them. These 60 non-physical states, is a kind of full list of how our mind engages with the world. This understanding is important since it reminds us that the error is not in the world itself—it is in our craving for things of the world and for worldliness, as famously stated in **the Nibbedhika Pariyāya Sutta** (A 6.63):³⁸

The thought of lust is a person’s desire: there are
no sensual pleasures in the diversely beautiful³⁹ in the world.

The thought of lust is a person’s desire.

The diversely beautiful in the world remain just as they are.

So here⁴⁰ the wise remove desire (for them).⁴¹

(A 6.63/3:410-416), SD 6.11

2.2.1.12 In the **Satta Vassa Sutta** (S 4.24), verse **S 503** records to Buddha as declaring the essence of his awakening teaching:

Amaccu, dheyyaṃ pucchanti

ye janā pāra, gāmino

tesāhaṃ puṭṭho akkhāmi

yaṃ saccaṃ taṃ nirūpadhin’ti (S 503)

What lies beyond Death’s realm?” ask
those people heading⁴² for the far shore.

When asked, I explain to them

the truth free from acquisition.⁴³

The supreme truth (*param’attha sacca*), then, is **nirvana**, which is free from any acquisition (*upadhi*). To awaken or attain nirvana is *to be detached and freed* from any kind of possession—wanting to *have* and being *had* by the wanting—material or mental, that feed existence and fuel rebirth.⁴⁴

2.2.2 Renunciation

2.2.2.1 When the Buddha replies: “**A peace-seeker should forsake the world’s lure**” [S 4*=311*], he means that true happiness is **inner peace**, which is worth seeking. This is better than being caught by the “lure” of the world, that is, trying to acquire the world for oneself. The world is what it is: we may partake

³⁷ D 22,19.5+20 (SD 13.2); SD 53,7 (2.4.1.2).

³⁸ This verse recurs as S 104 in **Na Santi S** (S 1.34,6/1:22), SD 42.6, except for line a which has been omitted and which reads *na te* for *n’ete*). The **A 6.63** verse is qu at Kvu 370; NmA 1:12. Comys however qu the verse **S 104**: SA 1:63×2, which attr it to comy on **Pasūra S**, Sn 830 (or one of its verses): SnA 2:539; AA 2:41. Cf Tha 674.

³⁹ Note that “the diversely beautiful” (*citrāni*) is plural.

⁴⁰ “So here the wise” (**ath’ettha dhīrā’ti atha etesu ārammaṇesu paṇḍitā chanda, rāgaṃ vinayanti**, “here then the wise removes lust and desire in the sense-objects,” SA 1:63). In other words, “here” refers to our minds.

⁴¹ On the verse’s significance, see SD 6.11 (2.2.2.1 (1)).

⁴² *Gamino*, lit “going,” but here the context shows that it includes those “seeking” to realize the ultimate truth and liberation, ie, awakening, too.

⁴³ S 503* @ S 4.24,8 (SD 36.5); see also SD 51.24 (2.5.2.3 (3) n) acquisitions.

⁴⁴ Further on *upadhi*, see SD 28.11 (3.2); SD 53.7 (2.3.1).

of it, even enjoy it, but we can never take it with us. If we try to (driven by craving and ignorance), we are simply trying to collect earth, water, fire, air and space.⁴⁵

Such a quest is simply in vain—how can we ever catch these natural elements in the net of craving? It is also an ignoble quest: when we run after something that changes and become other, we are only running farther away from the noble path. **The noble quest** is to seek for what is beyond change or becoming other.

2.2.2.2 To turn in the right direction, towards the path entails that we have to turn our back to the world—what our mind has been creating and projecting with our physical senses. To effectively do this (to let go of the world) means we must understand what **renunciation** (*nekkhamma*) really means and practise it.

One of the best ways to begin to understand that renunciation is the natural way to the path of freedom (another name for the path of awakening) is to reflect on the true nature of our **breath**. Our breath is **wind** (*vāyo*): we take it in, we become it and it becomes us; then, we have to give it back, let it go to where it has come from.

The same is true with **fire** (*tejo*) (that is, heat or temperature). We feel warm, we feel cold, we feel just right: these are all the process of heat-transfer. While it is true that our body generates heat, it does so in the context of its environment. We are warmed or cooled (we adjust our body heat) in connection with our environment. “Fire” also means decay: our body burns itself up taking in oxygen (oxygenation); it burns up food into matter and energy (metabolism); it burns our body up (decay), like other material states around us. In short, we take in heat; we give out heat.

Most of our physical body is **water** (*āpo*), a term for “liquid,” which is some 60% of our weight. This comprises blood, saliva, sweat, tears, urine and so on. We drink water, which is absorbed by our body, which processes it, and then it is passed out as urine, sweat, saliva and so on. We are, it seems, but a water-cycle.

Finally, we are **earth** (*paṭhavi*), that is, solidity, resistance and other qualities of matter (like texture, weight, etc). We take in food, ingest it: it feeds our body and fuel our vital processes. The waste of the processed food is passed out. This is another vital “earth-cycle” that we are and that support our life. We take in earth; we give it back to the earth, especially when we die: our whole body returns to these 4 primary elements.

What we take from nature, we have to return it. In fact, nothing in this world is ours. Hence, we cannot “have” or own any of it. We can only take or use what becomes it. When we do this mindfully and with contentment (taking only what is needed), then there is enough for all beings, and there is harmony in us and in nature around us. This is the broad significance of **renunciation**—a beautiful reflection.

2.2.3 Lok’āmisā

2.2.3.1 The Upanīya Sutta teaching ends with this line spoken by the Buddha: “**A peace-seeker should forsake the world’s lure**” (*lok’āmisāṃ pajahe santi,pekkho*) [S 4d* = 311d*]. Putting together what we have discussed thus far, let us apply it to this teaching. We will examine the Pali more closely.

The Commentary gives 2 explanations of **lok’āmisā**, which literally means “the carnal in the world”:

- (1) figuratively (*pariyāyena*), it refers to the whole of samsara (cyclic existence) with its **3 worlds** (those of the senses, the form and the formless): these are the objective sphere of attachment, “the world’s lure”;

⁴⁵ On the 4 elements, see M 28,-22 (SD 6.16).

- (2) *literally* (*nippariyāyena*), it signifies **the 4 requisites** (robes, almsfood, lodging and medicinal support, the material bases for survival. This last specifically refers to monastics. (SA 1:23,16-21)

The figurative use of *āmisa* (the carnal) recurs in the following Suttas:

		<u>verse</u>		
(Deva,putta) Nānā,titthiyā S	S 2.30/2:67	S 371d	all forms (states) are Māra’s fish-bait	SD 86.11
(Māra) Cha Phass’āyatana S	S 4.17/4:113	S 480c	the 6 senses are the “world’s bait”	SD 61.12
Bāḷisikōpama Sutta	S 35.230 /4:159		the 6 sense-objects are “Māra’s hooks”	SD 91.18

2.2.3.2 Figuratively, *lok’āmisa*, “the world’s lure” refers to seeing merit (*puñña*) as all there is that is good in the world, for the world, which keeps us in the world. As long as we are in the world, we will face its vicissitudes, the **worldly conditions** (*loka,dhamma*) of gain and loss, fame and obscurity, blame and praise, and joy and pain.⁴⁶ To stop at merits is to follow the “old way” that at best rewards us with heavenly rebirth, as represented by the deva or devas who utter the verse (S 3 = 310) [2.1.1].

However, when we understand and accept merit as a basis for or bridge to “**the wholesome**” (*kusala*) [2.1.2], then, we cultivate ourself closer to the noble path of awakening. Unlike *puñña*, which is the good that keeps us in the world, *kusala* or *puñña* as a support for *kusala*, prepares us to reach the path of awakening in this life itself.⁴⁷ [2.1.2.1]

2.2.3.3 **How we will reach the noble path** [2.1.1.3] in this life itself is represented by the verb, *pajāhe*, “should forsake.” [1.2.2]. This refers to the key Dharma-inspired practice of renunciation (*nek-khamma*), or more fully, “renouncing the world.” The “world” (*loka*) has 3 senses. The 1st is the world of space and time, which means that we should know the right place and right time—the most conducive conditions for spiritual living and practice.

The 2nd kind of world is that of beings, especially human beings. We should avoid the unwise and the negative (unless we are able to help them become wise and happy). The world is basically a “crowded” place where we are overwhelmed by the senses and distracted by the craving for sense-pleasures, which are, after all, our own mental creations and projections.

Hence, when we understand the impermanent nature of things, it prevents us from desiring and acquiring them. This gives a basic wisdom of *letting go* of the world that does not belong to us anyway. As we understand this, we are more and more free of worldliness [2.2.1]. The life of **true renunciation** is a letting-go of what is *impermanent* in the first place; it is an “emptying” ourself of the world since it is *unsatisfactory*; it is not identifying with the world, of not even seeing any kind of abiding self that we have or are: everything operates on the principle of *non-self*. We are then well on our way towards the path of awakening. [2.2.2]

3 The (Deva,putta) Uttara Sutta (S 2.19)

3.0 The verses of **the (Deva,putta) Uttara Sutta** (S 310*+311*) are identical to those of **the Upanīya Sutta** (S 3*+4*) below. This overlapping may be explained in either of two ways:

- (1) Uttara is the name of 2 different young devas uttering the same verse from a common pool of gnom-ic riddles;
- (2) Uttara is the unnamed young deva of **the Upanīya Sutta** (S 1.3).

⁴⁶ See **Loka,dhamma S 1+2** (A 8.5+8.6), SD 42.2 + 42.3.

⁴⁷ See SD 54.2e (2.3.5.3) where it is applied more broadly.

The divergence in location—the former in Rājagaha, the latter in Sāvattihī—may be explained by the possibility that the same deva appears to the Buddha at both places, probably after a long break between the two occasions. Anyway, even if the protagonists of the two Suttas are different individuals, the vitality of their verses are in no way diminished. In fact, their recurrence only highlights the popularity and significance of the verses.

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SD 54.2c(3)

(Deva,putta) Uttara Sutta

The Discourse on (the young deva) Uttara or The (Deva,putta) Discourse on Uttara

S 2.19/1:54 f (S 310*-311*) = (S 3*-4*)

Traditional: S 1.2.2.9 = Saṃyutta 1, Sagāthāvagga 2, Devaputta Saṃyutta 2, Anāthapiṇḍika Vagga 9

Theme: Life is short; hit the path now

1 Originating in Rājagaha.⁴⁸

Standing at one side, the young deva Uttara said this in the Blessed One's presence:⁴⁹ [55]

- 2 *“Upanīyati jīvitam appam āyu⁵⁰
jarūpanītassa na santi tāṇā.
Etaṃ bhayaṃ maraṇe pekkhamāno
puññāni kayirātha sukhāvahānīti.* (S 310)⁵¹
- Life is rushed on (to its end); time is short.
For one led on by decay, there's no shelter.
Seeing this danger in death,
let one make merits that bring happiness.

[The Blessed One:]

- 3 *Upanīyati jīvitam appam āyu
jarūpanītassa na santi tāṇā.
Etaṃ bhayaṃ maraṇe pekkhamāno
Lok'āmisam pajahe santi,pekkho'ti.*⁵² (S 311)
- Life is rushed on (to its end); time is short.
For one led on by decay, there's no shelter.
Seeing this danger in death,
a peace-seeker should forsake the world's lure.”⁵³

— evaṃ —

⁴⁸ *Rāja.gaha,nidānaṃ* (one of the rare cases; most others are *sāvattihī,nidānaṃ*).

⁴⁹ *Ekam antaṃ ṭhito kho uttaro deva,putto bhagavato santike imaṃ gāthaṃ abhāsi.*

⁵⁰ S 310ab = 311 ab recur in **Citta Sambhūta J** (J 498/4:398) as lines ab in verses 41-44 in connect with not creating bad karma spoken by outcaste Citta (the Bodhisattva) to king Avanti of Ujjenī.

⁵¹ On the Buddha himself uttering this verse (S 310*), see **Dve Brāhmaṇa S 1** (A 3.51) [2.1.1.5].

⁵² On the recurrence of **S 4d*** elsewhere, see (1.2.2.1).

⁵³ On the “world's lure” (*lok'āmisā*), see (2.2.3).

Upanīya Sutta

The Discourse on Leading On

S 1.3

- 1 Originating in Sāvattḥī.
 2 [Then, when the night was far spent, a certain deity of exceeding beauty, approached the Blessed One, saluted him, and stood at one side.]⁵⁴
 3 Standing at one side, he said to the Blessed One:

- 4 *“Upanīyati jīvitam appam āyu
 jarūpanītassa na santi tāṇā.
 Etaṃ bhayaṃ maraṇe pekkhamāno
 puññāni kayirātha sukhāvahānīti.* (S 3)⁵⁵ Life is rushed on (to its end); time is short.
 For one led on by decay, there’s no shelter.
 Seeing this danger in death,
 let one make merits that bring happiness.

[The Blessed One:]

- 5 *Upanīyati jīvitam appam āyu
 jarūpanītassa na santi tāṇā.
 Etaṃ bhayaṃ maraṇe pekkhamāno
 Lok’āmisarṃ pajahe santi, pekkho’ti.*⁵⁶ (S 4) Life is rushed on (to its end); time is short.
 For one led on by decay, there’s no shelter.
 Seeing this danger in death,
 a peace-seeker should forsake the world’s lure.”⁵⁷

— evaṃ —

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⁵⁴ Omitted in MS, supplied by **Nimokkha S** (S 1.2), SD 54.2b.

⁵⁵ On the Buddha himself uttering this verse (S 3*), see **Dve Brāhmaṇa S 1** (A 3.51) [2.1.1.5].

⁵⁶ On the recurrence of **S 4d*** elsewhere, see (1.2.2.1).

⁵⁷ On the “world’s lure” (*lok’āmisā*), see (2.2.3).